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C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 001006

SIPDIS

FOR WHA/CCA, EUR/ERA, AND EUR/NB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2014

TAGS: PREL PHUM ELAB CU FI ILO

SUBJECT: FINLAND: BOLSTERING SUPPORT FOR LABOR RIGHTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA

REF: A. STATE 153312

1B. STATE 152813

1C. HELSINKI 860

Classified By: LABOFF David A. Schlaefer for Reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

11. (C) As reported in Ref C, almost all official contact between Finland and Cuba has ceased, and Finland does not maintain an embassy in Havana.

12. (C) We are not aware of any current activity by the Finnish Government, or by Finnish NGOs, to support elements of Cuban civil society and encourage democratic change. Nor are we aware of any efforts by Finnish labor unions to advance labor rights in Cuba. Since receipt of Refs A and B, we have made some discreet inquiries, and turned up no evidence of any actions under way in this area.

Nevertheless, Finnish officials have said that the GoF policy toward Cuba is based on "encouragement of peaceful transition to pluralistic democracy and respect for human rights."

These are not empty words -- human rights concerns are a major factor in Finland's foreign policy. On the other hand, the Finns have a strong preference for multilateral action in most issues, via the EU if possible and in any case the more broadly-based the better. We therefore believe that the Finnish government and Finnish NGOs would be interested in principle in international efforts to assist democratic change in Cuba, but would not want to lead such an effort.

13. (C) The Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions, or SAK, is Finland's largest trade union confederation. It participates in the work of the ILO and belongs to the ICFTU and the OECD's Trade Union Advisory Council. Its international activities include promotion of worker rights, in areas ranging from Russia and the Baltics to South America, Asia, and Africa. The SAK may be interested in an international effort in labor fora to press Cuba to end labor rights violations, but again, we believe they would look for the broadest coalition of partners possible before joining and would be unlikely to take the lead in forming such a coalition.

MACK